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Illinois gun-control advocates handed out their 2007 awards Monday in Chicago, aware that the nine justices on the U.S. Supreme Court may make the biggest impact on gun control when they hand down a decision next year on the constitutionality of Washington, D.C.'s gun ban.

"Nearly every gun-control law in the country will hang in the balance of what will likely be a 5-4 court decision...", said U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin, who was awarded the 2007 Abraham Lincoln Award from the Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence (<http://www.ichv.org/>). "That makes (the council's) work even more important in Springfield and in Washington."

Durbin, a two-time winner of the Lincoln award, praised Algonquin Police Chief Russell Laine, who won the law enforcement recognition award, and legislative advocacy award winners U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk of Highland Park, State Sen. Daniel Kotowski of Park Ridge and Chicago Alderman Isaac Carothers.

"Russ Laine and I have worked together in so many ways," said Durbin, recalling visits to the suburbs, where Laine has grown to become a national and international leader in the fight against gun violence.

About to be installed as 2008 president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Laine was a key player in an exhaustive "common sense" report aimed at curbing gun violence. (That report can be found online through the <http://www.iacp.org/> site.)

"Safety issues are my focus," said Laine, a highly decorated Vietnam veteran who has won trophies for his target shooting as a police officer. "We have target shooters. We have hunters. They are not an issue for us."

Laine said he wants the law to target military weapons designed for killing many people, guns and ammunition designed to thwart police, and loopholes in the law that make it easier for

criminals to get guns and hide their illegal activities.

Fighting to close some of those loopholes on the state and national levels are Kirk, a Republican, and Kotowski, who, running as a gun-control advocate targeted by the National Rifle Association, became the first Democrat elected from his district since 1860.

"Mark, it can't be easy to be a Republican in the House and be for gun control," Durbin told Kirk. "You have stood up on that issue time and again and have shown real leadership."

A Republican who breaks from his party on many gun issues, Kirk said, "This cause should not be partisan at all."

Representing a district with both the extremely rich and very poor, Kirk highlighted the dangers of gangs getting guns.

"There are 3,000 gang members north of Lake-Cook Road," Kirk said. "The average gang shooter in North Chicago is in seventh grade."

A Navy intelligence officer, Kirk said the infamous Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) gang known for its violence not only has members in suburban Lake County, but has sent members to Iran for training.

Acknowledging that Democrats often are seen as the party for gun control, Kirk said he thinks his party should join that effort.

"To me, the Republican Party is a party that strongly supports law enforcement, and being able to trace crime guns ... is also a homeland security issue," Kirk said.

Citing statistics showing that 1 percent of gun shops sell 60 percent of the traceable guns used in crimes, Kirk said four gun shops in Mississippi have sold 300 guns used in gang-related crimes in our suburban area -- Mega Pawn, Krosstown Trade & Pawn and North Delta Gun Shop in Clarksdale, Miss., and the 61 Trade & Pawn Shop in Tunica, Miss.

Working with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Kirk says he would like to close loopholes that he says shield people who provide guns to criminals.

Kirk, Laine and others working for gun control will have their work cut out for them no matter how the Supreme Court rules.

"So in the words of Abraham Lincoln, let us have faith that right makes might," Durbin concluded. "And in that faith, let us, in the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it."